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The
FLORIDA BUGGIST

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THE CHASE OF CATOCALA

What the trout or the tarpon is to the fisherman, or the tiger-beetles to the coleopterist, the *Catocalas* are to the lepidopterist—the most “game” of all his prey. The hind wings of many species are very showy with wide, curved bands of red or orange. For these the moths are called “Underwings”. Their attractive colors and goodly size make a desirable showing in the cabinet. But in the woods, as the moths squat in their favorite day quarters on the bark of some tree, these gaudy colors are safely hidden under the somber grays and browns of the fore pair which are laid back at an angle of 45 degrees so that the moth forms a triangle. The camouflage is perfect and could the moths but sit pat, they could rest in peace as far as humans are concerned. But if one passes within a yard or two of the tree they invariably have an attack of “nerves” and dart away with a quick jerky flight and I can no more resist the impulse to give chase than can a puppy resist the impulse to pursue any rapidly moving thing, be it mouse or railway train. The lepidopterist may know full well that he already has a case full of that particular species and has no more need of another than has the puppy for the train, but the pursuit is the rarest of sports. The primitive instinct of the chase asserts itself and after the moth he goes. But the method of the chase must be that of the cat rather than the dog. We will watch the moth as it darts away to seek another hiding place, trying first one tree trunk and then another until it finds one dark enough to satisfy its negative heliotropism. It will always be in dense shade and usually on the side away from the sun. Towards dusk the moth may fly into the tree tops but very seldom during the middle of the day. Still more seldom does one alight on the level ground but often

under the overhanging edge of a perpendicular bank. As it darts away it usually becomes lost among the tree trunks. But by following it carefully with our eyes—and feet too—we can sometimes locate the alighting place. If we are so fortunate the stalking begins. No use to try a frontal attack on these wary fellows; they will invariably fly again long before one gets within striking distance. Having spotted our moth we will make a wide detour, the radius of the circle being in direct proportion to our desire for that particular moth, keeping our eyes constantly on the central tree trunk. The chances are that he will fly again before we can get near him, but sometimes fortune again smiles and we get up to the tree unobserved. By cautiously peeping around the bole we may bring one of his wings into view without being seen ourselves. Having thus located our quarry we make a quick sweep around the tree and capture our prize—sometimes. More usually we catch nothing but a fleeting glimpse of his gay underwings as the now thoroly frightened moth betakes himself to parts unknown. Rarely indeed does he give us another chance at him. Altho the chances are against us at every turn, if we are persistent and the moths plentiful, we may occasionally experience the thrill of seeing one wildly flapping in the net; a freshly landed trout jumping on the bank has no greater. But the moth is game to the last and sorrow and exasperation will surely be our lot if there is a hole in the net. But should fortune frown upon us and we leave the woods with empty bottle, we reek no more than the luckless fisherman who at the close of a perfect day goes home to a supper of collards. Have we not enjoyed a rare game? Are our lungs not full of the ozone of the forest, and our eyes and nerves, tired by a week's work in office or laboratory, again refreshed? It is rare sport, much superior I am convinced to either tennis or golf, and as for sitting idly on a bare bleacher and watching someone else play baseball—one might as well go to a formal reception.

Only in the more dense hammocks may we hope to find the underwings, a forest to whose floor but few rays of sunshine penetrate. And it must be a high and dry hammock where the larva's host plants, oaks and hickories, grow. A low hammock of maples, ashes and sourgums will yield us nothing. Furthermore it must, for a successful hunt, be comparatively free of underbrush. Not that the catocalas object to underbrush but the hunter does. To put all your energy and thought into a grand final sweep with the net only to tear it on a greenbrier

while the moth dashes away, is conducive to language which should be reserved for mules, stovepipes, and collar buttons.

The season of the Catocalas is from the last week in April to the middle of June. My earliest capture was of *ultronia celia* on April 11; but Grossbeck (Bul. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., vol. 27, List of the Lepidoptera of Florida) records *ilia* as having been captured at Lakeland on March 31. He does not record a single capture of any species after May 8. This is due, however, not to the lack of Catocalas after that date, but to the lack of collectors. Most of our entomologists have been migratory animals which left early in the season. Catocalas are at their height of abundance in late May and early June. Only two species have I ever captured after July 7: *ultronia celia* on Oct. 16 and *agrippina* from June 29 to September 13. Evidently the latter does not emerge until late June, which accounts for its having been missed by collectors.

THE CATOCALAS OF FLORIDA AND GAINESVILLE

Grossbeck lists seventeen species and seven varieties from the state. To these I can add two species and a variety as follows:

C. consor, May 25; said to be a rare species.

C. agrippina from Gainesville and its variety *subviridis* collected by Mr. Fritz Fuchs at Wauchula in June. So our Florida species now total 19 with 8 additional varieties. Of these I have captured about Gainesville but nine species and a variety.

Sappho seems to be our most common species, at least more have been captured. This, however, may be partly because its large size (often three inches across the wings) and the light gray color of its upper wings make it more conspicuous than the others. The under wings are dark brown edged with white. Both Holland and Barnes and McDunnough say it is rare. Its life history is entirely unknown. Its relatives spend their caterpillar days on the hickory and it is probable that this one does likewise. It is found only in woods with hickories.

Another with dark brown under wings is *epione*. This is smaller and the upper wings are mottled dark gray and brown. It has been captured only at Gainesville and in late May. It is evidently another late-emerging species which has escaped the tourist entomologists. Its larva lives on oaks and hickories.

Agrippina is the third species with dark brown unbanded under wings. Its colors are much like *epione* but it is a larger insect, some measuring 3.5 in.

Of the species with bright orange bands across the underwings, *ilia* Cramer is the most common. Its upper wings are mottled gray and expand 3.5 in. My captures are from May 12 to 23.

Cara is a trifle larger. It is more brown on the upper wings and the bands on the under wings are red. It is not common here because, of the food plants of its larva, willow is scarce and poplar entirely absent. Ours is the var. *carissimas*, the southern form.

Ultronria has much the same colors but is smaller, about 2.25 in.

Its var. *celia* has the first black band of the under wings narrower and usually a whitish smudge running lengthwise of the fore wing. Its larva feeds on oak, wild cherry, and plum.

In *muliercula* Guer (The Little Wife) the bands are yellowish orange. My captures range from May 26 to June 11, but Grossbeck records it from Lakeland as early as May 5. The food plant of the caterpillar is wax myrtle.

In *similis* var. *aholah* the orange has been replaced by yellow. This is the smallest of our species, measuring but little more than 1.5 in. April 18 is the only date.

The caterpillars of the hickory feeding species often attack pecans but seldom become numerous. The insect is a lover of the deep forest and visits the more open pecan groves only occasionally and at night.

PERSONALS

Clarence Bass, who is now with a subchaser doing patrol duty, recently enjoyed shore leave at Miami and renewed his acquaintance with former associates in the State Plant Board work.

F. F. Bibby is at present with the U. S. Field Hospital and is stationed at Santo Domingo, D. R.

O. K. Courtney is now in the employ of the Federal Horticultural Board and is stationed at New Orleans in connection with the work of inspecting plant importations at that port.

L. A. Daniel, District Inspector for the State Plant Board, is planning to leave for the North early in July to be gone for several months.

J. Chaffin is at present on a trip to the East Coast, where he is assisting various assistant nursery inspectors of the Plant Board in the work in their respective districts.